Gavi de Tarr

Instruction and Technology

Digital Games: JamStudio

10/17/2011

1. 7-12, better for high school grades. Music, composition.
2. Purpose of the game is to experiment with chord progressions and instrumentation.
3. The game is open-ended, with no “rules”. Using your knowledge of harmony, choose a sequence of chords (they have a list of diatonic chords that will always sound ok, as well as an advanced menu with non-diatonic ones that sound weird unless you know what you’re doing. But experimenting with the trickier chords can be part of the fun, even if you don’t know how it will sound), and then choose what instruments you want to be the accompaniment (drums, guitar, piano, etc). Each instrument has its own rhythmic pattern that is unchangeable. There’s no storyline or interaction with others besides possibly collaborating or showing off your composition. But it gives you immediate feedback once you press play.
4. JamStudio is great for experimenting with chord progressions, which is not something that is easy for non-piano players to do. It’s very accessible for any level of musician or non-musician to play around with and in a theory class could be used for a composition assignment.
5. It’s inflexible in many ways. The time signature can only be 4/4, the rhythmic patterns that each instrument plays are always the same, and you can’t add any melodies with any of the instruments. Not offering those features can be a plus, though, in that it puts the focus squarely on the harmony.